

3. Support development and adoption of Arizona Quality Standards for Afterschool Youth Development Programs

Vision: For afterschool standards to increase programs' ability to engage and inspire youth success through enhanced cognitive and social-emotional opportunities and supports

National Drop-Out Prevention Category: After-School Opportunities, School-Community Collaboration

Background:

Afterschool youth development programs (AYD) play a key role in student/youth success. In particular, they can play a strong role in combating two key causes of academic failure – summer learning loss and student engagement. Educators (and community leaders) have become increasingly aware of the role that youth programs and community play in student/youth success, however often struggle with the question of how to determine the quality of these programs. Research shows that AYD programs build critical 21st century skills, increase student engagement which in turn increases academic success, and have opportunities to reinforce learning from the school day. Participation in quality afterschool programs results in¹:

- Improved school attendance;
- Higher levels of student engagement and motivation to learn;
- Increased likelihood of high school graduation;
- Higher self-esteem;
- Enhanced social skills;
- Reduced delinquency, and
- Increased academic achievement in reading and math

Youth who attend high quality programs are more likely to avoid risky behaviors, have better performance in school and to have greater social competence².

Arizona Context:

There are numerous AYD programs in Arizona, but no commonly accepted standards of quality.

Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW), Arizona Center for Afterschool Excellence (AzCASE), Arizona College Access Network, and Science Foundation Arizona are collaborating to develop quality standards for after school programs. These quality standards will serve as an overarching rubric for entities looking to evaluate and improve the quality of their youth development programs, including schools looking to build supportive programs. There will be a core set of standards for all programs, but additional complementary sets of standards will be developed to address areas of focus such as STEM, college access, and summer programs. A draft of the standards will be available in late April or early May, and will be provided to the Taskforce for review.

The statewide committee drafting the standards is focused on the following areas:

- Engaging and intentional programming while promoting youth voice and choice
- Safe and appropriate environments

¹ Issues and Opportunities in Out of School Time Evaluation number 10 Harvard Family Research Project, February 2008.

² How Out of School Time Program Quality is Related to Adolescent Outcomes by Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D. and Kathleen Hamilton, M.A., August 2010

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- Healthy Relationships
- Family and community engagement
- Program leadership and management
- Program staff, volunteers and professional development
- Program evaluation and data

The cross-sector committee is committed to creating voluntary standards that are aspirational and achievable, and accessible to provider, parent, youth and community stakeholder audiences. They will be vetted across the state with youth, parents, providers, funders, policy makers and other stakeholders. The standards will be finalized summer 2013, upon which time a statewide effort will be launched to encourage the understanding and adoption of the standards by all stakeholder groups. Once the standards are complete, VSUW and AzCASE will continue to lead a statewide group of stakeholders to identify or create voluntary assessment tools and a professional development network to support programs in improving their quality.

Available Actions:

- Support the statewide partnerships to develop quality standards for all youth development programs, as well as those with a specific focus on summer learning, STEM, college access, and others
- Adopt the quality standards and imbed them in the work and partnerships of the Governor's Office
- Partner with ADE, DHS and DES and the entities listed above to promote/support the adoption of standards throughout the state
- Include information in communication materials (i.e. Arizona Ready)
- Support the partners listed above in the subsequent steps of creating a continuous quality improvement framework based on the voluntary quality standards and inclusive of commonly accepted, voluntary assessments, as well as professional development